

# The War at Sea

## William Tuck (1740–1826)

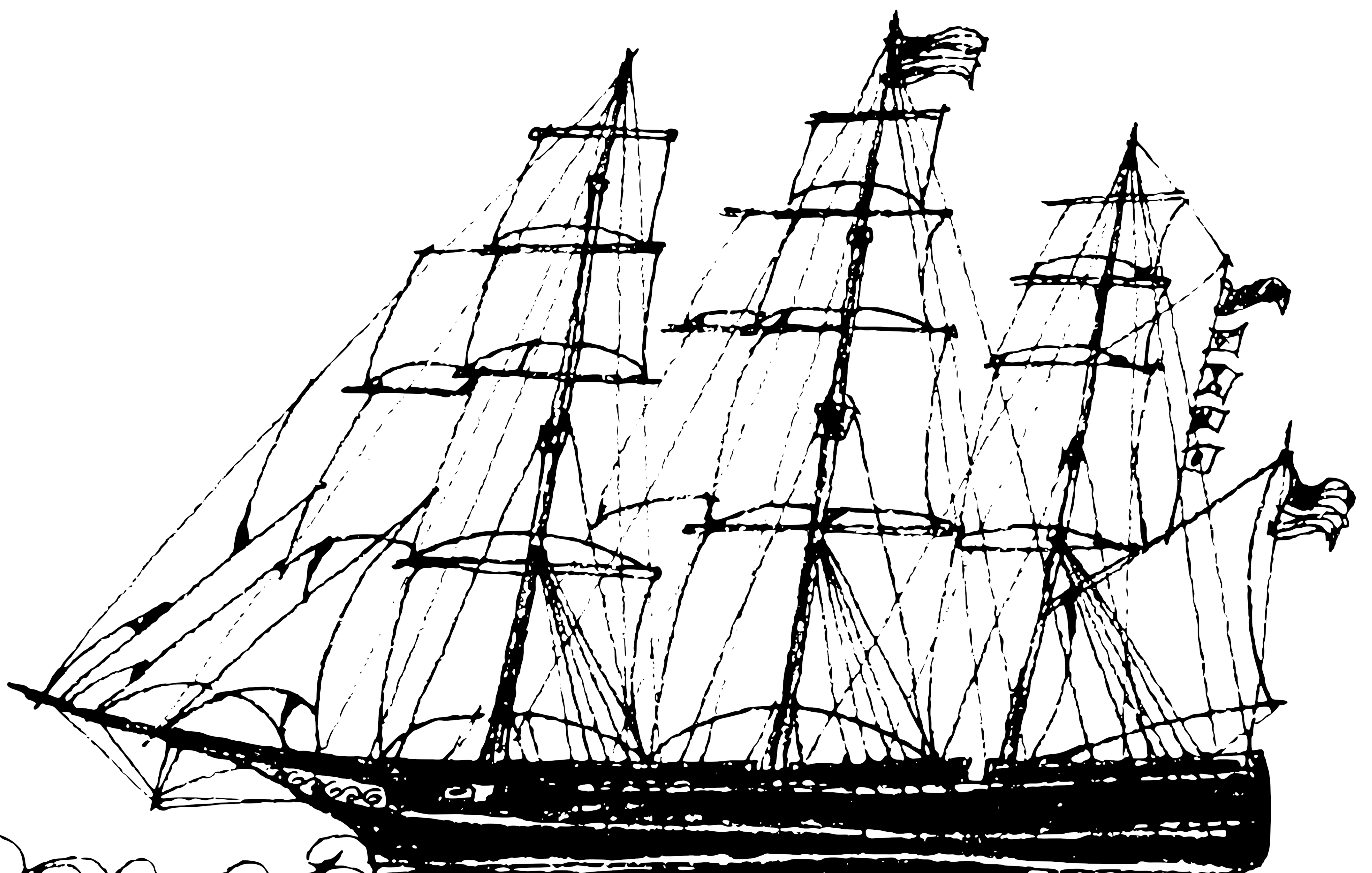
**Through great risk and reward, this seasoned mariner established himself as one of Manchester's most prominent men in the war at sea.**

William Tuck, an ambitious young mariner, married (in 1763) Polly Lee, of a wealthy Manchester family. Her father, Samuel Lee Jr., was Captain John Lee Jr.'s uncle. In the years 1766–1769, William commanded Salem vessels in trade with the Caribbean. He and Polly would have 10 children in Manchester. By October 1772, William Tuck was sailing in command of vessels owned by his wife's cousin, Colonel Jeremiah Lee of Marblehead. In September 1774, he sailed for Spain in command of the large Lee schooner "Manchester," and he arrived in Marblehead Harbor in March 1775, from Cadiz. It is likely that his return cargo (and perhaps the one prior) was gunpowder for the coming war.

In 1776, Captain Tuck was chosen to command a merchant vessel on a perilous voyage to Bilbao, Spain. There, acting in secrecy as the agent of the independent state of Massachusetts, he exchanged a load of salt fish for a cargo of gunpowder, essential to the fighting capability of the rebel army. In 1778, Tuck was given command of the Newburyport-based privateer brigantine "Bennington," mounting 18 guns. On one 90-day cruise ending in January, Tuck and his men captured several British vessels, including a ship from Jamaica laden with rum and sugar, which was sent safely into Gloucester, and a 12-gun privateer schooner, which may have put up a bloody fight. In between voyages, Tuck served as the town's representative to the General Court and, by 1780, as moderator of the town meeting.

Later in the war, in March 1782, Capt. Tuck commanded the large 400-ton privateer ship "Lyon," carrying 29 deck guns and 90 men, sailing from Salem. The "Lyon" was a letter-of-marque (privateer and trader) owned by Francis Cabot of Beverly. Only one day out of Salem, she was captured by the British frigate HMS "Blonde." Capt. Tuck and 60 men were put on board the "Blonde," which sailed for Halifax but was wrecked off Yarmouth, Nova Scotia. They escaped to Seal Island, 3 miles off, and soon were discovered by two American privateers. A deal was struck, and the British sailors were put ashore in a Tory part of Nova Scotia, while the prisoners were set ashore in Yankee-friendly Yarmouth, where they were given three vessels, fitted with provisions, in which about 100 men got home to Salem (Petition of William Tuck, May 1782).

Following the war, Tuck served as Customs Collector for the Gloucester District, was a justice of the peace, and even practiced medicine. William Tuck died at age 86 in 1826, and Manchester's Tuck's Point is named in his honor. His house is still standing as a private residence at 44 Harbor St., Manchester.



# Revolutionary Manchester